

Spring Museum Musings 2022

MADRAS SCHOOLS

Madras schools, operated by the Church of England, were so called because the originator, Dr. Andrew Bell, had introduced the system in a school in Madras, India. This system of educating the students was comparatively inexpensive, because even though there was an efficient teacher in charge of each school, the older scholars were employed to teach the younger students. (1)

The Madras school master taught lessons to the older and brighter students, each of whom were assigned to teach a group of younger students.

The system was not altogether successful. It was sometimes difficult to find teachers who had been trained in the system, creating a large hindrance. Also, some parents objected to their children being placed in the role of a teacher while others withdrew their children from the school to place them in trades, thus interrupting the continuity of instruction. However, in spite of such drawbacks, the system had many advantages and the Madras Schools remained popular for many years. Elementary students were educated at a small cost, improvement in manners and language of the children was noticeable and a system of rewards and punishments improved the discipline problems, making the schools even more efficient.

In 1819 a committee in charge of promoting the Madras system petitioned for a charter which was passed by the New Brunswick legislature in 1820. The Madras Board now had the right to establish schools if the funds allowed. Madras schools were established in various New Brunswick towns so that by 1824 there were thirty-nine such schools in the province. Teachers were trained in Halifax or Saint John how to teach their students, using methods established by the Madras system. This idea of teacher-training eventually led to the establishment of a Normal School in New Brunswick.

A senior citizen of New Maryland recalls her father speaking of a Madras school system which once existed in York County in the 1800's, as well as in other parts of New Brunswick. An early land grant map of New Maryland shows property, "Governors and Trustees of Madras School" totalling 424 acres of land, situated near the now vacant St. Mary the Virgin Anglican Church on the New Maryland Highway. This Madras property was granted in New Maryland on September, 1821. Even though there was no Madras school built on the property, the land was leased to New Maryland residents, William McKnight and Joseph Wittaker, for its timber and firewood. The rents realized from the leases were used to support the York County Madras Schools, the nearest one being on King Street in Fredericton. (2)

Although the Madras Schools were operated and funded by the Church of England, the attendance of children from all denominations was encouraged. Thirty-nine of these schools were established in the province by 1824. By 1870 eleven Madras Schools still existed in New

Brunswick but by 1900 the system was abandoned completely in favour of the Common Schools Act which had been established in 1871. (3)

(1) *Our New Brunswick Story*: Lawson and Sweet

(2) *Minutes of the Madras Board: Vol. 2* on file at the NB Archives

(3) *The Development of the Theory and Practice of Education in New Brunswick: 1784-1900*: Katherine MacNaughton

(Contributed by Kathleen Lister on behalf of the School Days Museum's Board Members)